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Method to understand Srimad Bhagavad Gita from Visishtadvaita and Advaita perspectives

Srimad Bhagavad Gita (SBG), as a truly universal spiritual teaching is definitely applicable to seekers of varying temperaments. The bhashya of Swami Ramanujacharya expounding the Visishtadvaita sampradhayam and the bhashya of Swami Sankaracharya expounding the Advaita sampradhayam guide the seekers on the respective paths. However, the bhashyas are seen to include criticisms of other sampradhayams, thereby giving rise to a sense of conflict of the paths. The intent of this brief article is to understand if there are truly conflicts in the paths, if one path alone is correct over the other and if the followers of the other are indeed led astray. This will be done by reviewing the fundamentals of both the sampradhayams followed by an analysis of alignment between the two.

Introduction to Visishtadvaita philosophy:

1. Brahman, Jiva and Jagat are ever distinct
2. Brahman is the independent sentient principle; Jiva is a dependent sentient principle; Jagat is a dependent insentient principle
3. Brahman is one & non-dual, whereas Jiva and Jagat are diverse
4. Brahman is absolutely independent whereas Jiva and Jagat are dependent on their controller Brahman
5. Per scriptures, Jiva and Jagat are inseparably associated with the antaryamin Brahman; just as the material insentient BMI is inseparably associated with the sentient individual jiva
6. Brahman, together with Its viseshanas - Jiva and Jagat - constitutes one composite whole

7. In Brahman there is no sajatiya bheda and there is no vijatiya bheda; however, there is svagata bheda or internal distinctions in the form of distinctions between Brahman, Jiva and Jagat
8. Jagat undergoes changes; Jiva is the experiencer of Jagat and its changes; Brahman is a mere witness of both Jagat's changes and Jiva's experiences
9. Brahman, Jiva and Jagat - all have qualities that are their very nature (svarupa) as well as qualities that are their attributes (viseshana)
10. Qualities as the very nature (svarupa) are those that are inseparable and indistinct from the entity itself
11. Qualities as the attributes (viseshana) are those that are inseparable but distinct from the entity itself
12. Being endowed with qualities Brahman, Jiva and Jagat are all said to be saguna (with gunas or qualities)
13. Brahman is said to possess all auspicious qualities in their unlimited absolute measures
14. Jiva is said to possess auspicious and evil qualities depending on the extent of its spiritual evolution
15. Jagat is said to possess all material qualities created from the pancha-bhutas (space, air, fire, water, earth)
16. The insentient material modes (gunas) are said to be sattva, rajas and tamas
17. These material modes influence the Jivas and binds them with Jagat
18. This power of influence of the material modes / gunas exerted on the Jiva is termed Karma
19. The state of the Jiva, being bound with Jagat, under the influence of Karma, is called samsara or bondage
20. When a Jiva has transcended Karma, all bindings with Jagat are cut-off, consequently the Jiva has transcended the influence of the mixed gunas of sattva, rajas, tamas
21. This state is called moksha or liberation

22. The very definition of this state implies the Jiva is no longer bound within the individual BMI comprising of the three gunas; consequently, moksha is only attainable after the current BMI is dropped off - in other words, death
23. Having transcended the ever-changing mixed gunas, Jiva in the state of liberation acquires a superior material mode called shuddha-sattva or pure-sattva, which is different from the sattva as associated with rajas and tamas
24. This shuddha-sattva is bereft of all influences of Karma and is capable of transforming into any pure material object, including a pure form of BMI
25. Some Jivas are ever liberated and are called nitya-atmans; some Jivas are currently in bondage and are called badha-atmans; other jivas who were previous in bondage and have attained liberation are called mukta-atmans
26. The nitya-atmans and mukta-atmans reside in Brahman's very own eternal abode called SriVaikunta or nitya-vibhuti, which is transcendental to the created material universe of samsara or leela-vibhuti wherein badha-atmans reside
27. Jiva is said to possess consciousness / knowledge / jnana, both - as its very nature (svarupa) as well as its attribute (viseshana)
28. Jnana as the very nature of a Jiva is immutable and the same across all Jivas; this is called svarupa jnana and is the self-awareness or the 'I-notion'
29. Jnana as the attribute of a Jiva is mutable and varies across different Jivas; this is called dharma-bhuta-jnana (DBJ) and is the knowledge of awareness of other objects
30. DBJ is influenced by Karma in the state of bondage
31. Depending on the influence of Karma, the DBJ of a Jiva is contracted; creating a gradation of various living entities starting from a blade of grass (most contracted) to the highest four-faced Brahma (least contracted)
32. The performance of positive activities (or punya) decreases the impact of Karma, thereby expanding DBJ; meanwhile performance of negative activities (or papa) increases the impact of Karma, thereby contracting DBJ
33. Devotion to Brahman & guru and complete surrender to Brahman & guru leads to an effacement of Karma, purely by Brahman's grace, maximizing DBJ

34. Bereft of Karma, a Jiva is liberated and the DBJ is at its absolute maximum, just as the nitya-atmans and to the same extent of Brahman Himself
35. This Brahman is the Lord Sriman Narayana, alongside Thayar Lakshmi Piratti

Summarizing bondage / ignorance and liberation / knowledge:

1. Jiva, under the influence of Karma, with a contracted DBJ is said to be in bondage or badha-atman
2. Avidya or ignorance is the Karma itself
3. Knowledge is the performance of activities with the correct mental and intellectual attitude that can reduce / remove Karma; mere intellectual knowledge is incapable of reducing Karma
4. The state when Karma is completely overcome and DBJ is fully expanded is called liberation or moksha
5. Jiva, having attained this state, purely by Brahman's grace & guru's guidance, is said to be liberated or mukta-atman

Swami Ramanujacharya has explained SBG in a completely consistent manner in alignment with the above philosophical concepts.

Introduction to Advaita philosophy:

1. Brahman - one alone and non-dual - is the absolute reality or absolutely real and is the truth or technically "Satya"
2. Satya is that which exists and is never changing; Brahman is Satya
3. All of our day-to-day experiences, including all plurality and distinctions, are observed to be changing
4. Our day-to-day experiences are taken for granted as real and this is called relative reality or relatively real or technically "Mithya"
5. Mithya is that which exists but is observed to be changing

6. Change includes the 6 broad aspects - birth, continuance, growth, modification, decay, death (as described in the Nirukta)
7. The entire gamut of all our experiences is not absolutely real but only appears as real within the context of the day-to-day experiences; hence all experiences are technically categorized as Mithya
8. An experience involves the triad (triputi) of experiencer (subject), experienced (object) and the means of experience (means); which are distinct from each other
9. Or with respect to knowledge, the triad (triputi) of knower (subject), known (object) and means of knowledge (means); which again are distinct from each other
10. With the triputi coming in association, there arises the new experience or knowledge in the subject, implying a change in the subject
11. The individual subject Jiva (experiencer or knower) is said to comprise of two aspects - the sentient Self or Atman and the individual insentient non-Self BMI (body mind intellect complex)
12. The individualized insentient material non-Self BMI is said to comprise of the manifested physical body with its 10 sensory organs, the 5 vital airs (prana), the antahkarana ("inner instrument" consisting of mind, intellect, memories and ahamkara) and the underlying unmanifested vasanas or Karma
13. Originating from the vasanas / Karma and up to the physical body, all these are grosser manifestation of material principle - vasanas / Karma
14. Per scriptures the Self is said to be eternal, immutable, pure consciousness, all pervading and ever unassociated
15. The non-Self is impermanent, subject to changes, insentient and associated in the form of cause-effect relationship
16. As the non-Self undergoes change, the immutable Self observed in context of the non-Self appears to be changing as well
17. Examples given to illustrate this includes: just as a mirror is twisted, the reflected face appears to be twisted as well; just as the various pots of water having ripples appears to

distort the reflected image of the Sun; presence of multiple pots in a room appears to delimit space into distinct pot-spaces

18. In all these cases, namely the original face, the actual Sun, and the one homogenous space actually remain unchanging; their reflections or delimitations alone appear as if changing
19. The changes to the mirror, water, pots are misunderstood to be affecting the pervasive face, Sun, space pervading the mirror, water, pots respectively
20. Similarly, one of the very nature of the non-Self, particularly the aspect called ahamkara, is its ability to misunderstand the qualities of the non-Self as the qualities of the pervasive Self
21. This process is called mutual superimposition or adhyasa; and is defined as the “cognition of an entity as something else”
22. Adhyasa is mutual, in the sense that the qualities of non-Self are superimposed on the Self and the qualities of the Self are superimposed on the non-Self
23. The resulting entity appears to possess a combination of the qualities
24. A popular example for adhyasa includes the perception of a rope as a snake in a dim-lit room; wherein the qualities of the rope (size, shape, color, position etc.) are superimposed with the qualities of the mental image of a snake (sentience, poisonous, dangerous) and the resulting entity - snake with the appropriate size, shape, color, position etc. - appears to exist on the ground
25. A person who perceives this entity (actually a rope) as a snake considers it as a real snake until they realize that it is only a rope
26. The initial perception of the snake appears to be real until that is changed by the later cognition of the rope
27. The perception of the snake is thus technically called as “Mithya” since it initially appeared to exist but later on observed to be changed / sublated by the cognition of the rope
28. The knowledge of the rope-as-snake is thus called Mithya jnana or false knowledge and the knowledge of the rope as-it-is is called jnana or true knowledge

29. The adhyasa here is the misunderstanding of the rope as the snake; the true knowledge is the clear discriminating understanding of the rope as the rope itself
30. Similarly, under the influence of ahamkara, perceiving the non-Self as the Self is adhyasa or Mithya jnana or false knowledge; and the recognition of the true nature of the Self as-it-is, without any superimposition of non-Self, is true discriminating knowledge or Satya jnana
31. This adhyasa or false knowledge is also called as avidya or ignorance or delusion; and since this adhyasa is the very nature of material principle, vasanas / Karma are also technically called as avidya
32. This avidya is an inherent nature of the antahkarana (inner instrument - mind, intellect, memories, ahamkara)
33. The resulting entity of the adhyasa of the Self and the individual antahkarana is said to be the individual Jiva
34. The individual Jiva is said to possess the combined qualities of the Self and non-Self; the sentience principle or pure Consciousness or pure jnana being the very nature (svarupa), whereas the sense of limited individuality ('I') and changing agentship (knower, doer, enjoyer) as its attributes
35. The Jiva is thus said to possess the sense of individuality as ahamkara and the relation with other entities as mamakara
36. The agentship, as an attribute of the Jiva, brings about the sense of being the 'knower' or 'experiencer' (subject); the distinction of the antahkarana with other objects brings about the distinction of 'known' or 'experienced' (object); and the individual BMI itself, through sense organs and mind, acts as the 'means of experience' or 'means of knowledge' (means); the result in the individualized distinct experience or knowledge of the object, and is also called objective experience or objective knowledge
37. Therefore, the very experience or knowledge of the individual subject, and the corresponding triputi, is only the result of adhyasa or avidya; but actually, all activities (no exceptions whatsoever) are performed by the BMI alone (under the influence of

- Karma) and the Self is a mere constant witness; the ahamkara aspect of antahkarana superimposes this agency and makes it appear that the Jiva is the doer
38. In other words, the Self conditioned by the limited individual antahkarana is the Jiva; the Jiva is said to be influenced by the individual vasanas / Karma / avidya
 39. A similar discussion on the collective scale gives rise to Brahman conditioned by collective antahkarana as the Isvara; Isvara is said to possess or control the collective vasanas / Karma also called as prakruti or maya
 40. While a Jiva is said to be under the influence of individualized avidya due to limited knowledge, Isvara, on the other hand, is said to control the collective maya because of unlimited omniscience
 41. But in both - Jiva and Isvara - there is a conditioning and superimposition of Self / Brahman with the material qualities constituting of gunas; consequently Isvara and Jiva are both technically called 'saguna' or "with gunas"
 42. The true nature of the Self / Brahman, bereft of adhyasa, is said to transcend all gunas & material qualities; consequently called 'nirguna' or "bereft of gunas"
 43. The knowledge of the Self as the Self itself, discriminating the Self from the non-Self, is said to be true knowledge that can overcome this adhyasa or avidya or ignorance; this knowledge is gained only by the grace of Isvara and under the guidance of a guru
 44. Bereft of adhyasa, with all sense of limitations transcended, per scriptures, the true nature of the Self or Atman is realized to be identical to Brahman
 45. It is thus said that this realization of true nature of Brahman-Atman is the realization of 'nirguna' Brahman; whereas the attainment of Brahman with the sense of individuality (Jiva) retained is the attainment of 'saguna' Brahman
 46. Both these are accepted as valid moksha / liberation; the realization of 'nirguna' Brahman happens here-&-now and is called immediate realization (sadyo-mukti); the attainment of the 'saguna' Brahman by proceeding to the 'saguna' Brahman loka after death through various stages is called liberation through stages (krama mukti)
 47. However, important to remember that this realization or knowledge is also only at the antahkarana level; Brahman-Atman-Self is ever realized

48. The individual BMI, even after gaining this true knowledge, can continue to persist and function under the influence of Karma (prarabdha Karma)
49. Such an individual person is called a jivanmukta (liberated while living) and is termed as the 'jnani', 'tattva-darshi', 'sthitaprajna', 'Brahma-vit', 'tattva-vit', 'parama-bhakta', 'paramahansa' etc. in the scriptures
50. A jnani, through their personal direct knowledge (aparokshanubhuti), is thus empowered as a guru to teach and guide other seekers on the spiritual path

Summarizing bondage / ignorance and liberation / knowledge:

1. The adhyasa between the Self and the non-Self is termed as avidya or ignorance
2. The result of this adhyasa is the apprehension of the individual sentient entity called Jiva who is considered as the agent (knower, doer, enjoyer) and this state is called bondage
3. In the state of bondage, at the collective level, the overall controller is called Isvara controlling the collective maya which has transformed into the material Jagat
4. The discriminating knowledge that results in the direct realization of the true nature of the Self and identity as Brahman is called knowledge; this is pure knowledge gained by the grace of Isvara & guru and has no aspect of any activity directly included within
5. The state of realization of the true nature of the Self as Brahman, while non-Self continues to function under the influence of individual and collective residual Karma, is called liberation

Swami Sankaracharya has explained SBG in a completely consistent manner in alignment with the above philosophical concepts.

Having said so, let's review the alignment between both the sampradhayams. To begin with, Swami Sankaracharya has accepted the relative reality of the world of distinctions and the association of attributes to Brahman. Let's consider the philosophical concepts of Visishtadvaita (VA) and review the Advaita (A) perspective.

1. VA: Brahman, Jiva and Jagat are ever distinct
2. A: This distinction is accepted in vyavaharika (empirical day-to-day experience)
3. VA: Brahman is the independent sentient principle; Jiva is a dependent sentient principle; Jagat is a dependent insentient principle
4. A: This is accepted in vyavaharika
5. VA: Brahman is one & non-dual, whereas Jiva and Jagat are diverse
6. A: This is accepted in vyavaharika
7. VA: Brahman is absolutely independent whereas Jiva and Jagat are dependent on their controller Brahman
8. A: This is accepted in vyavaharika
9. VA: Per scriptures, Jiva and Jagat are inseparably associated with the antaryamin Brahman; just as the material insentient BMI is inseparably associated with the sentient individual jiva
10. A: This is explained by stating that the resulting entity of adhyasa contains qualities that are a combination of the Self and the non-Self. The qualities of the non-Self now appear as the attributes of the Self. The same is true on the collective level wherein Isvara's attributes are the entire manifestation. This is also consistent with the concept that maya, Isvara's attribute, is the material transformative cause of the entire universe. Furthermore, the adhyasa with each aspect of material manifestation gives rise to the sense of individual limited sentient entities. These sentient entities are also perceived as the non-different but distinct from the substratum.
11. VA: Brahman, together with Its viseshanas - Jiva and Jagat - constitutes one composite whole
12. A: This is accepted. The fact that Brahman is considered as the efficient and material cause of the entire manifested universe corroborates this concept.
13. VA: In Brahman there is no sajatiya bheda and there is no vijatiya bheda; however, there is svagata bheda or internal distinctions in the form of distinctions between Brahman, Jiva and Jagat

14. A: Brahman being the one and only efficient & material cause of the manifested universe implies there is no sajatiya or vijatiya bheda in Brahman. But the manifestation of distinct names and forms, by maya, implies the existence of internal differences or svagata bheda in the form of distinct parts.
15. VA: Jagat undergoes changes; Jiva is the experiencer of Jagat and its changes; Brahman is a mere witness of both Jagat's changes and Jiva's experiences
16. A: This is clearly accepted by the analogy of the two birds in a tree. The individual Jiva (Self conditioned by the intellect) experiencing the world (bird eating the fruits) is distinct from the Isvara (Brahman conditioned by maya) who is a mere witness.
17. VA: Brahman, Jiva and Jagat - all have qualities that are their very nature (svarupa) as well as qualities that are their attributes (viseshana)
18. A: This is accepted as it is clearly said that Isvara has the 6 qualities of Bhagavan as the attributes. Jiva is said to possess limited qualities as attributes, including the agentship. Jagat, by its very manifestations includes attributes. All three are also said to possess the essential qualities of existence etc. as its very nature that designates the entity.
19. VA: Qualities as the very nature (svarupa) are those that are inseparable and indistinct from the entity itself
20. A: This is an accepted definition
21. VA: Qualities as the attributes (viseshana) are those that are inseparable but distinct from the entity itself
22. A: This is an accepted definition
23. VA: Being endowed with qualities Brahman, Jiva and Jagat are all said to be saguna (with gunas or qualities)
24. A: Indeed, at the vyavaharika level, all three entities (Isvara, Jiva, Jagat) possesses attributes and thus by definition are saguna
25. VA: Brahman is said to possess all auspicious qualities in their unlimited absolute measures
26. A: This too is accepted as direct statement of the scriptures as it pertains to the saguna Brahman or Isvara

27. VA: Jiva is said to possess auspicious and evil qualities depending on the extent of its spiritual evolution
28. A: The very fact that a jiva under ignorance is deluded and subject to changing sattvic, rajasic, tamasic qualities implies the possession of auspicious and evil qualities depending on the extent of sattva preponderation
29. VA: Jagat is said to possess all material qualities created from the pancha-bhutas (space, air, fire, water, earth)
30. A: The concept of panchikarana, accepted and explained by Swami Sankaracharya, corroborates this statement
31. VA: The insentient material modes (gunas) are said to be sattva, rajas and tamas
32. A: The three modes of nature / prakruti / maya - namely sattva, rajas, tamas - is accepted per scriptures
33. VA: These material modes influence the Jivas and binds them with Jagat
34. A: Yes indeed. Karma is said to be this prakruti that influences individual BMIs and corresponding adhyasa resulting in individualized Jivas
35. VA: This power of influence of the material modes / gunas exerted on the Jiva is termed Karma
36. A: Accepted as explained above
37. VA: The state of the Jiva, being bound with Jagat, under the influence of Karma, is called samsara or bondage
38. A: This definition too is accepted. Not directly as the fundamental definition of ignorance or bondage, but more as the corollary of the ignorance & associated delusion.
39. VA: When a Jiva has transcended Karma, all bindings with Jagat are cut-off, consequently the Jiva has transcended the influence of the mixed gunas of sattva, rajas, tamas
40. A: This is again accepted as the corollary of the state of liberation wherein there is no more misunderstanding the non-Self as the Self. Consequently, the immutability of the Self by gunas or Karma is realized as well.
41. VA: This state is called moksha or liberation

42. A: This is accepted as a state of moksha, particularly as the krama-mukti path
43. VA: The very definition of this state implies the Jiva is no longer bound within the individual BMI comprising of the three guna; consequently, moksha is only attainable after the current BMI is dropped off - in other words, death
44. A: Indeed krama-mukti entails the death of the physical body for the individual soul (Self conditioned by the subtle body) to progress to higher spheres
45. VA: Having transcended the ever-changing mixed gunas, Jiva in the state of liberation acquires a superior material mode called shuddha-sattva or pure-sattva, which is different from the sattva as associated with rajas and tamas
46. A: In the path of krama-mukti, as the influence of Karma wanes, the influence of rajas and tamas wanes as well. When rajas and tamas is completely eradicated, pure sattva alone remains to condition the Self. This pure sattva is termed as shuddha-sattva because of complete removal of rajas and tamas; but not as if this shuddha-sattva is different from the other sattva seen as part of the three-gunas. In other words, though shuddha-sattva is accepted, it is not a fourth of a different material quality than sattva itself.
47. VA: This shuddha-sattva is bereft of all influences of Karma and is capable of transforming into any pure material object, including a pure form of BMI
48. A: This too is accepted in the path of krama-mukti wherein the Jiva is said to obtain powers of satya-kama and satya-sankalpa
49. VA: Some Jivas are ever liberated and are called nitya-atmans; some Jivas are currently in bondage and are called badha-atmans; other jivas who were previous in bondage and have attained liberation are called mukta-atmans
50. A: There is no reason to contradict this statement from the perspective krama-mukti. The only difference would be that even the “nitya-atmans” and “mukta-atmans” obtain true kaivalya moksha at the end of the current creation cycle.
51. VA: The nitya-atmans and mukta-atmans reside in Brahman’s very own eternal abode called SriVaikunta or nitya-vibhuti, which is transcendental to the created material universe of samsara or leela-vibhuti wherein badha-atmans reside

52. A: In Advaita, per krama-mukti, this liberated world is called as the saguna Brahman loka. Depending on the characteristics of the saguna Brahman, as cognized by the jiva, to be such as Vishnu or Shiva, the world could be called as SriVaikunta or SriKailasa. Though this world is still within the realm of distinctions, this can be considered as liberated world since the inhabitants are all guided through the full jnana of Brahman-Atman ekatvam prior to pralaya. There is also the other perspective of certain references to Brahman's abode, even as SriVaikunta or SriKailasa, referring to the eternal state of Brahman (nirguna) realization itself. In this perspective, reaching Brahman's eternal abode is same as attaining Brahman which is same as realizing the true nature of Brahman / Atman / Self. Therefore, from both the perspectives all scriptural statements as well as the Visishtadvaita perspectives are reconciled within Advaita.
53. VA: Jiva is said to possess consciousness / knowledge / jnana, both - as its very nature (svarupa) as well as its attribute (viseshana)
54. A: The Jiva is considered to possess both the eternal immutable svarupa jnana or subjective knowledge as well as the mutable viseshana jnana or objective knowledge
55. VA: Jnana as the very nature of a Jiva is immutable and the same across all Jivas; this is called svarupa jnana and is the self-awareness or the 'I-notion'
56. A: The svarupa jnana or subjective knowledge is same as the pure jnana that is Brahman, as evident in the scriptural statement "satyam jnanam anantam Brahman".
57. VA: Jnana as the attribute of a Jiva is mutable and varies across different Jivas; this is called dharma-bhuta-jnana (DBJ) and is the knowledge of awareness of other objects
58. A: The viseshana jnana or objective knowledge is called as the vritti jnana since this corresponds to the jnana produced by the antahkarana vritti
59. VA: DBJ is influenced by Karma in the state of bondage
60. A: Yes, the vritti jnana is completely influenced by Karma. Essentially the modifications of the antahkarana are called vrittis. The antahkarana itself is only the manifestation of unmanifest vasanas / Karma. The vrittis corresponding to the perceived objects, when illuminated by the Consciousness principle reflected through the antahkarana, gives rise

to the intellectual knowledge called vritti jnana. This vritti jnana is a mental / intellectual state of modification. Due to adhyasa, this mental / intellectual state is superimposed as an attribute of the resulting Jiva.

61. VA: Depending on the influence of Karma, the DBJ of a Jiva is contracted; creating a gradation of various living entities starting from a blade of grass (most contracted) to the highest four-faced Brahma (least contracted)
62. A: This is also acceptable since the vritti jnana is influenced by the Karma (vrittis are manifestations of Karma). It is said that yogis and siddhas through special practices gain powers to know the past, present and future. This can be said as expansion of knowledge, and in comparison to it, our current limited knowledge is said to be contracted.
63. VA: The performance of positive activities (or punya) decreases the impact of Karma, thereby expanding DBJ; meanwhile performance of negative activities (or papa) increases the impact of Karma, thereby contracting DBJ
64. A: Rajas and tamas are said to restrict or contract vritti jnana. Sattva is said to expand vritti jnana. Karma, being as aspect of prakruti or maya, consists of these three gunas. By performance of activities that reduces the levels of rajas and tamas, and consequently increasing the sattva, the influence of Karma is tuned towards the expansion of vritti jnana. On the other hand, activities that increase rajas and tamas will impact the influence of Karma towards contraction of vritti jnana.
65. VA: Devotion to Brahman & guru and complete surrender to Brahman & guru leads to an effacement of Karma, purely by Brahman's grace, maximizing DBJ
66. A: This can be seen in two perspectives: 1) From a transcendental perspective, it is clearly accepted that no amount of self-effort or any activity can result in the direct realization of Brahman. This is because the performance of any effort or activity involves functioning antahkarana (functioning here implies changes of distinct vrittis). On the other hand, the true nature of Brahman / Atman is realized only when all mental activities of distinctions are transcended. At this point, it is not self-effort but the pure grace of Isvara and guru, as the very Self / Atman / Brahman, that reveals Itself to the

prepared antahkarana. This itself is supreme devotion and highest knowledge. Such a person is true bhakta and jnani. This is sadyo-mukti 2) Even from krama-mukti perspective, it is Isvara's grace and the guru's blessings that devotion to the Lord grows in the mind. Furthermore, progress to higher worlds is guided by the Lord's special emissaries. Through devotion, as the influence of karma is tuned more sattvic, there is an expansion of vritti jnana. This is called chitta-shuddhi (mental purification) and chitta-ekagrata (one-pointed mental devotion).

67. VA: Bereft of Karma, a Jiva is liberated and the DBJ is at its absolute maximum, just as the nitya-atmans and to the same extent of Brahman Himself
68. A: When pure sattva alone remains, yogic powers of omniscience are said to manifest. The scriptures explicitly state that in the saguna Brahman loka, the Jiva is said to possess most powers and attributes of the Lord Himself (except the powers of creation). These powers and attributes are all aspects of vritti jnana. This is completely accepted in krama-mukti.
69. VA: This Brahman is the Lord Sriman Narayana, alongside Thayar Lakshmi Piratti
70. A: There are several advaitins who worship the saguna Brahman in the form of Lord Sriman Narayana and Thayar Lakshmi Piratti and family. They are the Vaishnavas believing in and following Advaita sampradhayam. Similarly, there are Shaivites, Shaktas etc. also following Advaita sampradhayam. There is absolutely no conflict whatsoever in being a devotee of Lord Vishnu / Lord Krishna / Lord Rama / Lord Narasimha and also be a true Advaitin.

It is thus seen that though Swami Ramanujacharya and Swami Sankaracharya have explained SBG in a completely self-consistent manner, any comparison between their specific shloka explanations are figuratively comparing apples to oranges. Advaita sampradhayam does not stand in conflict with Visishtadvaita's philosophy as there is a complete alignment from a certain perspective. The criticisms are neither applicable nor valid. Therefore, though the bhashyas may contain criticism of other sampradhayams, it is important for an earnest seeker to pass over such criticisms and restrict to the context of the specific sampradhayam.

Recalling the summarization of the two sampradhayams -

Visishtadvaita sampradhayam:

1. Jiva, under the influence of Karma, with a contracted DBJ is said to be in bondage or badha-atman
2. Avidya or ignorance is the Karma itself
3. Knowledge is the performance of activities with the correct mental and intellectual attitude that can reduce / remove Karma; mere intellectual knowledge is incapable of reducing Karma
4. The state when Karma is completely overcome and DBJ is fully expanded is called liberation or moksha
5. Jiva, having attained this state, purely by Brahman's grace & guru's guidance, is said to be liberated or mukta-atman

Advaita sampradhayam:

1. The adhyasa between the Self and the non-Self is termed as avidya or ignorance
2. The result of this adhyasa is the apprehension of the individual sentient entity called Jiva who is considered as the agent (knower, doer, enjoyer) and this state is called bondage
3. In the state of bondage, at the collective level, the overall controller is called Isvara controlling the collective maya which has transformed into the material Jagat
4. The discriminating knowledge that results in the direct realization of the true nature of the Self and identity as Brahman is called knowledge; this is pure knowledge gained by the grace of Isvara & guru and has no aspect of any activity directly included within
5. The state of realization of the true nature of the Self as Brahman, while non-Self continues to function under the influence of individual and collective residual Karma, is called liberation

The explained nature of ignorance itself is different to begin with. Consequently, the nature of knowledge that can overcome this ignorance and the process to gain this knowledge is different. Consequently, the spiritual sadhana is different. But it is the author's firm conviction that both the paths are indeed valid and is only based on the temperament of the seeker. Being completely aligned and devoted to either of the paths will still result in the same ultimate state of realization and attainment of Brahman. The focus of a comparative study is only to understand the distinct perspectives and identify the path of best alignment as suited to one's temperament. Instead of focusing on criticizing the other sampradhayam, all one needs to do is embrace and adhere to one's aligned sampradhayam and surrender to the Great Lord.

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